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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 Background of the Problem

The background to the problem of Incipient Gnosticism lying behind Jesus teaching begins in the 20th century and must be seen in it's growth and emergence from the Eusebian model of church history that that lasted for the first 1900 years of ecclesiastical history.

Eusebius of Caesarea who lived from A.D. 263-339 has been called the "father" of church history. He wrote the most popular and detailed church history that we have from ancient times covering the first 300 years of Christian history (Williamson 1965:20). Eusebius categorized the books of the New Testament that were universally accepted as (o0mologou/mena) and those books that were spoken against were known as (a0ntilego/mena) (Schaff 2002:522). Other books were declared by Eusebius to be spurious or heretical (Schaff 2002:523). These books were seen as falling outside of Christian doctrine or teaching. Church councils would later solidify this earlier perspective.¹ Eusebius popularized the viewpoint that orthodoxy was the original form of Christian belief and that heresy was a false perversion of it (Ehrman 2003:164-5). This has come to be known as the Eusebian model of church history. It was this model that dominated 1900 years of church history until the modern period (Ehrman 2003:164-7). During this time the Bible

¹ In the Western Church, *The Council of Hippo* (A.D. 393) and *The Third Council of Carthage* (A.D. 397) gave a complete listing of the canonical books of both the Old and New Testament that should be read as Divine Scripture in the churches to the exclusion of all others (Bruce 1988:232).

was viewed as the sacred foundation of Western civilization and regarded as God's divinely inspired revelation (Borg 1998:121-127). This perspective would soon come under attack.

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Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), a German historian, wrote a work entitled *On The Intention of Jesus and His Disciples* (Levine, A.J. 2006:5). Reimarus brought the canonical Gospels under attack by saying that they were human creations that recorded made up stories that rested on historical distortion or fantasy (Wright 2002:6). Reimarus asserted that the disciples stole Jesus body and invented the story of His resurrection as well as the doctrine of His 2nd coming (Levine 2006:5). Soon scholars would look outside the NT for information about the historical Jesus.

In Tübingen, Germany a school was founded by professor F.C. Baur (1792-1860) which reevaluated the trustworthiness of the NT writings and looked outside the NT to clues to historical developments in the first century (Ehrman 2003:170-1). He wrote a doctoral thesis entitled *Die Christliche Gnosis oder die Christliche Religionsphilosophie in ihrer Geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1835) in which Gnosticism was treated as the starting point for Christianity (Rudolph 1984:31-32). Baur's school was called The History of Religions School or *Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. This school used such sources as the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature for insight into the development of early Christianity (Johnson 1996:93). According to Baur, all religions are different manifestations of divine revelation in history (Hodgson. 1966:15). Walter Bauer (1877-1960) continued these ideas by demonstrating Christianity's founding from a number of divergent forms and sources, including writings outside

of the NT (Bauer 1971:2-22). In other words, there were many diverse "Jesus movements" that preceded the later development of orthodoxy (Johnson 1996:117). Under Bauer's system the words "orthodoxy" and "heresy" become irrelevant and to some extent inappropriate since competing views existed side by side in earliest Christianity with none having a claim to original authority (Bock 2006:55). However, the greatest impact would be made by Rudolph Bultmann and those who would follow his pattern of thought into a new generation.

Rudolf Karl Bultmann lived from 1884-1976. He was a professor at the University of Marburg. He completely reinterpreted the NT demonstrating an interaction with Incipient Gnosticism in which the writers of the NT appropriated it as well as confronted it (Yamauchi

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1979:129-131). Bultmann was the first to see a "Gnostic redeemer myth" lying behind John's Gospel (Bultmann 71:376-77)(Hays 2000:119). Bultmann subsequently began a program to "demythologize" the NT starting with John's Gospel (Malet 1968:184-5). Bultmann's appeal to Oriental Gnostic or Mandaean sources came under devastating attack from his contemporaries (Robinson 1962:287-289). Nevertheless, through the use of Gnostic or Incipient Gnostic sources, Bultmann had laid the foundation of NT scholarship for years to come. Soon Bultmann's work would be revolutionized by the discovery of 52 Egyptian codices in a place called Nag Hammadi, Egypt (Robinson 1962:287-289).

In 1945, Arab peasant Muhammad Ali discovered 52 Gnostic or semi-Gnostic texts written in an ancient form of Egyptian known as Coptic (Thatcher 1999:323). Bultmann's last student, Helmut Koester, has popularized the view that several of these writings are sources for the earliest developments of traditions about Jesus (Thatcher 1999:326). Many scholars see these writings as Gnostic and date them to the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Rudolph 1987:42-3). However, Koester has placed many of

them within the 1st century and sees them as the source of the canonical material (Koester 1990:49-71, 113-187). Koester views these “other gospels” as a valid and vital part of the life and faith of the early Christians (Cameron 1982:10).

Koester, his students, and ideological cousins have embarked on a new journey to learn more about the earliest and most primitive Jesus tradition by examining the texts from Nag Hammadi (Thatcher 1999:339). The question that is then posed before us is, “if Gnosticism or Incipient Gnosticism underlies Jesus teaching, does it necessitate the redefinition of Jesus teaching of His bodily resurrection from the dead or the physical resurrection of all believers in the future (Yamauchi 1979:129-131)?” Many would answer yes to this question. Therefore it seems that the doctrine of the resurrection has come under attack (Wright 2006:532-552). The resurrection has been relegated to a mere symbol by some rather than a historical event (Pagels 1979:35-37). Others have seen it as a subjective vision or mere hallucination (Craig 2000:187-200). Others have called for a “reconsideration” of the doctrine altogether (Riley 1995:178-180). The “crisis” that lays open before us is one of faith (Thomas and Farnell 1998:13-34). If there is no resurrection or if the resurrection is past how can one believe (2

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(2 Timothy 2:17-18)?

1.1.2 Problem Statement

What did Jesus teach about the resurrection of the dead in the *Gospel According to John* in light of recent scholarly attempts to redefine His teaching as having its roots in Incipient Gnosticism? In order to answer this question, several smaller research questions must be answered.

1.2 THE QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1.2.1 What is Gnosticism? What is Incipient Gnosticism?

1.2.2 What does Gnosticism teach about the resurrection? What do the texts from Nag Hammadi teach about the resurrection? Are the Nag Hammadi Codices Gnostic? Which of these texts do scholars most often take seriously as the source of Jesus teaching in the canonical Gospels? What methodology do they employ to determine the dating of these texts?

1.2.3 How have scholars advanced or challenged the theory that Incipient Gnosticism lies behind the Fourth Gospel?

1.2.4 What role does the discovery at Qumran or the Dead Sea Scrolls (*DSS*) play in helping us find a suitable background for John's Gospel? What is the Jewish view of the resurrection?

1.2.5 What did Jesus teach about the resurrection of the dead in *The Gospel According to St. John*?

1.3 THE IMPORTANCE AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

1.3.1 The Hypothesis

This study is expected to reveal that *The Gospel of John* presents the resurrection of the dead as having both a present (realized) as well as a futuristic (eschatological) aspect to it.

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We will find that both aspects are relevant to Christian believers. It is also expected to reveal that there have been serious scholarly attempts to undermine or completely do away Jesus teaching on the resurrection of the dead. The methodology employed in reaching this conclusion has been by finding the roots of Jesus teaching in Incipient Gnosticism through other Gospels and documents which these scholars feel have been improperly ignored throughout church history (Crossan 1992:ix).

However, this study is expected to reveal that the methods and research done by these scholars is to at least some extent flawed.

1.3.2 Academic Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is both academic as well as personal. Academically speaking, recent scholarly trends have tended to see Jesus teaching on the resurrection only in light of Gnostic and Incipient Gnostic sources like those found in the Nag Hammadi library. New light needs to be shed on the “new” History of Religions School and their modern scholarly methodology. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices has come to challenge and even undermine the faith of some in the canonical literature and and cause many to set aside the insight and instruction of the Church Fathers.

1.3.3 Personal Motivation and Significance

One well known and extremely gifted academician candidly admitted that a “lifetime of critical scholarship” had “destroyed” his faith (Robinson 2000:145). From the researcher’s standpoint, I stumbled about in spiritual darkness for the first sixteen years of my life. I went to church regularly with my family, but biblical higher criticism had disempowered the church, leaving only an outward shell of Christianity. The legacy begun by Hymenaeus and Philetus mentioned by the Apostle Paul in 2 Tim. 2:17-18 lives on in the highest church offices and seminary professorships throughout the land. They encourage us to follow “new trajectories” which take into account the “complexity of historical developments” like the influence of Incipient Gnosticism behind Jesus’ teaching (Koester 2006:269-270).

The importance or significance of this study cannot be underestimated. Should *The Gospel of John* be removed from the canonical literature because it was influenced by Incipient Gnosticism (Morris 1995:59)? If it is influenced by Incipient Gnosticism, what is

the extent of the impact of such an influence? More specifically, what impact on Jesus' teaching in *The Gospel of John* on the resurrection of the dead?

1.4 THE OBJECTIVES AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to solve the main problem mentioned above. We will attempt to determine what Jesus taught about the resurrection of the dead in John's Gospel in light of recent scholarly attempts to root His teaching in Incipient Gnosticism. This problem can only be solved by addressing each of the research questions (a. through e.) mentioned above. It will therefore be our objective to answer those questions to a reasonable person's satisfaction. If we succeed in solving the main problem, we will have overcome a major tendency to devalue the canonical writings in the place of extracanonical literature. In addition, we will have defended and protected the living hope and motivation of believers to live for Him who rose, ascended, and sits at the Father's right hand (1 Peter 1:3; Acts 23:6).

1.5 THE PLAN OF THE STUDY (2 STAGES)

Our primary research design will involve the analysis of literary texts (Mouton 2001:67-8). The texts analyzed will be those from the Nag Hammadi library, *The Gospel According to John*, and the Dead Sea Scrolls or DSS, as well as relevant citations from the Church Fathers. Inductive logic will be employed to analyze and interpret the extracanonical material (Mouton 2001:167). The testing of these hypotheses will be through deductive logic (Mouton:167).

1.5.1 Conceptual or Theoretical Stage

The study will take on two stages. The first stage will take on the epistemological aspect of what Gnosticism is, what it teaches about the

resurrection of the dead in the Nag Hammadi texts, and an analysis of the methodology used by modern scholars to place Incipient Gnosticism as the source of Jesus' teaching. In the second stage, the methodologies used by these scholars will be tested against what Jesus taught about the resurrection of the dead in *The Gospel According to John*. Therefore, in the first stage conceptual or theoretical methodology will be employed. The second stage will involve exegetical methodology.

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1.5.1.1 Epistemological Methodology

In the first stage epistemological methodology will be used. This will involve a general overview of the Gnostic as well as Incipient Gnosticism as a philosophical foundation that could potentially undermine Jesus' teaching on the resurrection (King 2003:62-3). It will be important not to analyze Gnosticism as a single heretical sect, but an entire social system that had many different teachers and forms behind it (Williams 1991:259-262)(Jonas 2005:27). In addition, the various scholarly theories about Gnosticism's origin will need to be taken under consideration (Smith 2004:60-64).

1.5.1.2 Analytical Methodology

In addition, I will carefully analyze the relevant Nag Hammadi writings to determine what the general teaching of Gnosticism or Incipient Gnosticism is on the resurrection of the dead. I will analyze the variety of different Gnostic perspectives in light of their different branches and schools of thought.

1.5.1.3 Comparative Methodology

Using the comparative approach with the extracanonical literature will help to avoid interpretive bias (Mouton 2001:168). The apocryphal texts to be compared are the ones that have most frequently been given

serious consideration as the source Jesus' teaching (Charlesworth and Evans 1998:480-1). In other words, there is a wealth of early Christian canonical and extracanonical sources (Theissen and Merz 1996:24-25). However, we will only be discussing the ones that scholars have considered relevant for the reconstruction of the life and teachings of Jesus (Theissen and Merz 1996:24-25). The texts under consideration are those that scholars contend were either written in the 1st century or contain traditions that go back to that time (Theissen and Merz 1996:24). The primary six texts under consideration will include *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Peter* (containing the "Cross Gospel"), *The Dialogue of the Saviour* (containing the "Dialogue Gospel"), *The Egerton Gospel* (otherwise known as Papyrus Egerton 2), *The Apocryphon of James*, and *The Gospel*

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of Secret Mark (Dunn 2003:162-172)(Crossan 1988:xiv-xv). Of these texts, the ones scholars give the most attention to is *The Gospel of Thomas* (Witherington 2006:27-34)(Cameron 2004:89-108). This is the text that has been taken the most seriously as the source of Jesus teaching (Grant 1960:100-107)(Klauck 2003:107-109). Many have dated parts of *The Gospel of Thomas* within the 1st century and have seen it as a source of Jesus teaching independent of the tradition contained in the Synoptic Gospels (Kloppenborg 1990:88-90). In other words, many scholars situate *Thomas* as a source more primitive than the Synoptic Gospels and argue that it contains traditions that may have been unknown to the four Synoptic Gospel writers (Lapham 2003:115)(Pagels 2003:34).

There are other documents that have been given some attention by the scholarly community, but are not given as serious attention as the source of Jesus teaching. These would include the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Infancy Gospel of James*, *Gospel Oxyrhynchus 840*, *Gospel*

Oxrhynchus 1224, and *The Fayyum Fragment* (Miller 1994:367-441). The texts often associated with Jewish Christianity, *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, *The Gospel of the Hebrews*, *The Gospel of the Ebionites*, and *The Gospel of the Nazoreans* will be discussed briefly (Hennecke, Schneemelecher, and Wilson, 1963). Although scholars date many of these documents in the 2nd century, some argue that they incorporate material early enough to have influenced Jesus teaching (Barrett 1967:31)(Crossan 1991:427-430). Generally speaking, the criterion for including certain texts depends their age and potential influence on Jesus teaching and the Jesus tradition (Elliot, J.K. 2006:xiii).

1.5.2 The Second Stage (Exegetical Methodology)

The exegetical step will involve a detailed study of each text in John's Gospel pertaining to the resurrection of the dead. The texts will include Jn 2:19-22;3:15-16;5:24-29;6:39-54,68;8:35,53,56;10:28;11:24,25-26,32-43;12:23-25,32-35,50;13:1-3;14:1-3;16:20-22;17:1-5,11,13;20:1-29.

1.5.2.1 Delimitation of Exegesis to *The Gospel of John*

The exegetical aspect of the study will be limited to *The Gospel According to John*. There are several reasons for this. First, many scholars feel that John drew on traditions that were

not available to Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Witherington 1995:37). In addition to this, possible background influences for John's Gospel have been speculated much more than for the Synoptic Gospels (i.e. Hellenism, Incipient Gnosticism, Palestinian Judaism, etc.)(Brown, R.E. 1966: xlii, lii-lxiv).

The debate of whether Incipient Gnosticism influenced John's Gospel is far from settled² (Beasley-Murray, G.R. 1999:lv). In fact, some scholars feel that John's Gospel contains several lines that lend themselves to Gnostic systems³ (Hill 2006:280-1). Modern scholarship sees John's Gospel as the most heavily influenced as well as the most evolved theologically. Therefore, resolving the problem of Jesus teaching on the resurrection in this Gospel will allow us to set the standard for the rest of the New Testament and more specifically, the Synoptic Gospels.

In addition, *The Gospel According to John's* salvation and resurrection passages can be placed into the two categories of "realized eschatology" or salvation in the present and "final eschatology" or futuristic salvation (Brown, R.E. 1966:cxv-cxx). Bultmann completely erased John's futuristic eschatology by arguing that a later "ecclesiastical redactor" had added passages that refer to the future resurrection of believers in *The Gospel of John* (Correll 1958:80-81). However, the majority of scholars see a tension or ambiguity between the Johannine passages that teach a futuristic and a realized eschatology (Kysar 1975:213). Therefore, clarity as to what Jesus taught eschatologically in John's Gospel will serve as a

² To be more specific The Gospel of John tells the story of how Jesus preexisted as a heavenly redeemer who descended to spread saving knowledge, then reascended to heaven. Since several of the texts from Nag Hammadi tell the same story, some feel these texts had some influence on The Gospel According to John (Dart 1988:xvi).

³ Most scholars agree that John's Gospel was monopolized by the Gnostics through much of the 2nd century (Hill 2006:205). For example Irenaeus writing in the 180's describes how Valentinian Gnostics derived much of their system from John's Prologue (cited in Logan 1991:109-110). In addition, Gnostic theologians are the first known authors to have produced exegetical commentaries on it (Pagels 1989:16-17). It has been suggested by some that The Gospel of John did not emerge in preference by orthodox Christians until the end of the 2nd century (Smith 1999:25).

test case in resolving this difficulty elsewhere. Scholars have removed John's Gospel from historical Jesus studies due to its lateness and due to the potential influences behind it. Therefore, if the issue of what Jesus actually taught on the resurrection can be resolved here, it can be certainly be resolved in other areas of the NT that are not as heavily influenced and where the language is not as ambiguous. Hence, John's Gospel serves as the best test case.

1.5.2.2 Source Criticism

The sources behind *The Gospel of John* will be critical to the interpretation of Jesus on the resurrection. Rudolf Bultmann's main criticism came from a scholar from the University of Chicago named Carsten Colpe. Colpe wrote a monograph called *Die Religionsgeschichte Schule: Darstellung und Kritik ihres Bildes Vom Gnostischen Erlösermythos* where he was able to disprove Bultmann's assertion that a "Gnostic Redeemer Myth" laid behind John's Gospel. Colpe did this by showing that Oriental and Mandaean sources presumed for the Incipient Gnostic backdrop for John's Gospel were only partially present (King 2003:141-147). Colpe's methodology of carefully examining sources rather than assuming them to be historically traceable will be used (Robinson 1962:289). Colpe's methodology was effective in showing that attempts made by Bultmann and others in the History of Religions School to recover earlier and pre-Christian sources was entirely speculative (Dodd 1958:98). This same methodology will be used by the researcher.

1.5.2.3 Historical Criticism

It will be necessary to reconstruct the history of the text to determine the background or degree of dependency of the selected texts (Bock and Herrick 2005:205-236). The historical elements in *The Gospel of John* will be important to help us determine the background of the Gospel (Porter 2000:31-32). The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) has shifted the scholarly opinion about the background of John's Gospel from a 2nd century Greek composition to a late 1st century Jewish writing

(Charlesworth 1996:65). Special attention will be paid to the connection between the findings from Qumran and texts in John (Charlesworth 1990:76-105). We will take under careful consideration the idea that John may have a Semitic background and may be the most Jewish of the four Gospels (Reed 2003:709-

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726)(Charlesworth 1988:77-98). Locating Jesus teaching as having its roots in early Judaism will challenge the credibility and use of early Gnostic or Incipient Gnostic sources (Charlesworth 1992:9-12). In addition, the possible origin of the doctrine of the resurrection in the DSS or the community at Qumran will be addressed (Charlesworth 2006:145-153). Moreover, there have been other archeological findings that help bring to light the Palestinian background of John's Gospel (Von Wahlde 2006:523-530).

1.5.2.4 Rhetorical Criticism

Each of the selected passages in *The Gospel According to John* will be looked at for their rational arguments pertaining to the resurrection when tested against the belief that Incipient Gnosticism is the source of Jesus teaching.

1.5.2.5 Structural/Form Criticism

The passages will be looked at in light of their literary and semantic structure to shed more light on Jesus teaching on the resurrection (Bock 2002:181-187).

1.5.2.6 Redaction Criticism

J.H. Charlesworth has defined redaction criticism as the method used by scholars to study the editorial activity of the biblical writers (1991:63-64). Each text will be examined in light of the possibility that later

motivated theological editing could have taken place (Smith 2006:349-350).

1.5.2.7 Textual Criticism.

When a challenge has been raised as to the originality of the text in *The Gospel of John*, it will be necessary to reconstruct the original text. Original languages of primary source material will be used when appropriate. This will be done for both the canonical as well as the extracanonical literature.

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1.6 Overview

This study will have five chapters. The first chapter will involve the laying out of the research problem and its parameters. This will be done through a discussion of the background of the problem leading to a discussion of the problem itself. Moreover, the first chapter will involve a discussion of the reasons, motivations, and aims of the study. Finally, the first chapter will involve a lay out of the research design and methodology to be used to solve the problem. It is approximated that this chapter will be completed by January of 2008.

The second chapter will be the literature review. In this chapter, I will position the study within contemporary Incipient Gnostic research. The study will be positioned within current research on the background and teaching of Jesus on the resurrection of the dead in *The Gospel of John*. This will be done with careful analysis of Incipient Gnosticism as the backdrop for Jesus teaching. The projected date of completion for the second chapter is August 2008.

The third chapter will involve a thorough synopsis of what Gnosticism and Incipient Gnosticism is, what the Nag Hammadi codices teach on the future resurrection of the dead, and the recent scholarly trends to redefine Jesus teaching as having its roots in Incipient Gnosticism. The projected date of completion for this chapter is April 2009.

The fourth chapter will involve a thorough analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls or *DSS* as an alternative to an Incipient Gnostic backdrop to John's Gospel. In addition, this chapter will involve a thorough exegesis of Johannine teaching on the resurrection of the dead as a test case for the recent Incipient Gnostic viewpoint. This chapter is projected to be completed in December of 2009.

The final chapter will involve summary of the findings of the study and their significance for Christians today. This chapter is projected to be completed in June of 2010.

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